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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to learn how a new "experience" component in education foundations' core course work would be evaluated by teacher-trainees and their critic teachers, who were experienced classroom teachers. Project subjects were 186 men and women (84 senior students in a required Foundations of Education senior level core course, and 102 critic teachers in local public schools). The 84 students were required to do 12 hours of field experience as part of a course called "Problems in Education." A Likert Scale was used to collect, from each student and teacher, evaluations of the nine assigned tasks that made up the field experience component. Point bi-serial correlation was used to analyze these data. Mean responses of students indicated that each of the tasks was valued--from 3.5 (moderate value) to 4.5 (much value), while experienced teachers valued the tasks also, but significantly higher--from 4.0 (much value) to 4.8 (very much value). The study showed: (1) that this new curriculum component of teacher education was perceived as valuable both by teacher-trainees and by their critic teachers; and (2) that the critic teachers valued the tasks more highly than did the teacher-trainees. (Author/JMK)

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Field Experiences in Educational Foundations: An Evaluation of a New Component of Teacher Education

Education Foundations

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Field Experiences in Educational Foundations: An Evaluation of a New Component of Teacher Education

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Abstract

This study was conducted to learn how a new "experience" component in foundations' core course work in teacher education would be evaluated by teacher-trainees and their critic teachers, who were experienced classroom teachers. The subjects in this project were 186 men and women (84 senior students in a required Foundations of Education senior level core course, and 102 critic teachers in local public schools). The 84 students were required to do 12 hours of field experience as part of a course called Problems in Education. A Likert Scale was used to collect from each student and teacher evaluations of the 9 assigned tasks that made up the field experience component. Point bi-serial correlation was used to analyze these data. Mean responses of students indicated that each of the tasks was valued--from 3.5 (moderate value) to 4.5 (much value), while experienced teachers valued the tasks also, but significantly higher--from 4.0 (much value) to 4.8 (very much value). The study showed 1) that this new curriculum component of teacher education was perceived as valuable both by teacher-trainees and by their critic teachers, and 2) that the critic teachers valued the tasks more highly than did the teacher-trainees.

A major question should be asked of instructors who deal with course work in Educational Foundations. Do courses that include historical, philosophical, and social topics provide unique experiences that can contribute to pre-student teaching hours that have been added in clinical and field settings? The answer appears to be yes. There are indeed school and community experiences that have become an integral part of courses entitled "Problems in Education," "School and Society," and "Current Issues in Education."

These experiences are closely related to viewing education in its larger sense, separating the narrow perception of schooling from the broader view of education. Students have been directed to visit agencies, other than schools, that educate in our society and to observe and interview practitioners with the social-philosophical perspective in mind. Examples of these places would be health centers, libraries, and recreation centers. These visits and the interviews would indeed help to cement the view that education is a cooperative venture that includes the school, the family, the administrator, and the teacher.

In school, field activities can also be geared to the kinds of activities that are important in foundations courses. The following is a suggested list of activities:

(1) Interviews with those who set policy in a school district;

(2) Observations on how this policy is then implemented;

(3) Meetings with special educators and special teachers to see how they perceive their role;

(4) Interviews with teachers in a school to discuss their classroom management in relationship to the school's philosophy

(5) A visit to a school board meeting

This is only a partial list and there are many more things to be done in school settings that can be directly tied to the analytical skills stressed in

foundations course work. All, or any, of these activities would add a professional dimension to the training of the preservice student, but it is important to attempt to assess their relative value.

As a result of new guidelines for teacher education in Ohio and elsewhere, there is much effort going into the design of new curriculums, much of it in the form of field experiences (Dunbar, 1981; Scannall and Guenther, 1981). Instructors in all areas of course work for teacher-trainees are attempting to add field based components, including the core courses taught by faculty trained in Educational Foundations. Experienced teachers, as well as state departments of education, have been calling for more field experiences (Witters and Sybouts, 1973) and members of these groups have reported feeling better prepared practitioners as a result of them (Kilgore, 1980). It is clear that nothing can be known about the value of these new curriculum components without careful research to assess them. This study will help to determine if field experiences are appropriate to course work dealing with historical, philosophical, and sociological topics in education. At this time, such documentation does not exist, but many teacher training institutions are still being required by state fiat to add many hours of field experience to all course work.

There are various ways to evaluate curriculum designed to train teachers. One could use the competencies approach by selecting certain teacher skills that research has shown to be effective in enhancing student learning (Aspy, 1977; Gnagy, 1975; Kounin, 1970; Peterson, 1978) and by testing to see that such competencies are taught to teacher trainees and then demonstrated by them in classroom settings. This is already being done in such institutions as The University of Toledo. Alternatively, one could test the usefulness of new teacher education curriculum by testing the effects of teachers' behavior on

students' learning (Combs, 1978). In addition, one might call upon an outside expert to observe and evaluate the effectiveness of new teacher behaviors on student learning (Gilman, 1978). That kind of research is valuable, but the literature on the subject indicates that improvements and additions to the evaluations are needed (Houston, 1980; Ishler, 1980). This research will attempt to add to the literature by completing the task of evaluating teacher and student perceptions on a new component of teacher education.

This type of research has its limitations; it will reveal only what practicing teachers and what teacher trainees perceive about the value of one new curriculum component and the degree of difference in perceptions. The limitations are clear, but the findings will, nevertheless, be useful to most teacher training institutions that have been adding field components. We can learn from this research whether this type of highly structured program is valued by these persons. We can learn whether all tasks are valued equally, or whether there is a hierarchy of valuing of activities. There is currently a spate of new curricula in colleges of education, especially in Ohio, because of the new guidelines. These new programs must be evaluated as they are designed and implemented. If they are not, teacher educators and program directors will continue to be charged with advocating and implementing new programs without the benefit of prior assessment of them or without using evaluation techniques that are an important part of good teaching. Another advantage in the ongoing enterprise of improvement of teacher education is the cooperation and experience of all segments of the profession. This cooperation is urgently needed if change and improvement are to take place (Hall and Hord, 1980; Witters and Sybouts, 1973).

This study describes an evaluation of a field experience component that has become a required part of all sections of a senior level foundations

course. The sections were taught by different instructors, but the activities were supervised for all sections by two graduate assistants. There was a need to assess the value of the component in all sections because changes were to be made in the course, and specifically in the field component, before the course was taught again in the Fall. The research showed that the experience appeared to be valuable for the students and the cooperating teachers; however, the greatest benefit of the study was a greatly improved field experience in the second year of operation.

This project was developed to learn how a new experience component in core course work would be evaluated by experienced classroom teachers (critic teachers) and by teacher-trainees (student teachers). Specifically, the researchers wanted to determine (1) how experienced teachers would rate elements of a structured teacher education curriculum innovation; (2) how teacher trainees would rate elements of a structured teacher education curriculum innovation; (3) the differences, if any, in ratings; and (4) what consequences might be suggested by these outcomes for the redesign of teacher education curriculum. In terms of the field experience component, this input was greatly valued by the researchers who were attempting to improve and further justify clinical experiences in social foundations course work in their college and department.

Whether the model proves to be useful or not, the results will be valuable for persons concerned with teacher education, the education of professionals, or with the design, implementation and evaluation of new curricular components, because if teacher education is to be improved, good communication is needed among important persons engaged in the enterprise; i.e., among teacher trainees, practicing teachers, and teacher educators. If teacher

trainees perceive teacher education curriculum differently from teacher educators and from practicing teachers; i.e., if perceptions and valuings of training procedures or curriculum differ, unless this difference is known, communication among these persons involved in the education of teachers is going to be deficient. With poor communication, inadequate understanding, judgment, personal relations, and practice are all likely to result.

Each of the three groups involved in this curriculum innovation has such different experiences, needs, hopes, fears, and goals. It would be expected that their perceptions of events--in this case required curriculum components --are going to vary, and perhaps radically (Combs, 1962). Students of behavior know this to be true of human dynamics but perhaps do not in their thoughts and actions use the knowledge as fully as they might (Aspy and Roebuck, 1977). The research study revealed this difference and suggested ways this disparity of perceptions might be used to improve the professional education of teachers. These different perceptions are functioning and will continue to inhibit practice unless they are known and dealt with (Houston, 1980), and colleges and departments of education will continue to be viewed as the weakest unit unless their faculties become more research-oriented and better able to empirically defend their curriculum.

It is interesting to note that although one might predict differing perceptions to occur in the valuing of these curricular components by the three different groups, one does not know if the degree of difference in valuing is critical, serious, mild, or trivial. The present research tested the hypothesis and was able to deal with the question of degree since its findings included tests of the significance of differences between perceptions of critic teachers and of teacher trainees.

Knowledge of program strengths and weaknesses, as well as input from experienced teachers, should be used to modify teacher education programs. As the components are changed, teachers will feel valued, knowing that their efforts are being incorporated into new teacher education curriculum. This awareness can in turn diminish the feelings so often voiced of being used or ignored by teacher educators. This proved to be the case with this research, and this understanding and cooperation have never been more important than currently. There are widespread complaints from the public about public school education, about teachers, and about teacher education. At the same time, many states across the country are mandating types of improvement in teacher education programs that require close cooperation between colleges of education and public schools.

Methods of Research

The subjects in this project were 186 men and women, 84 of them senior students in a required Foundations of Education senior level core course, and 102 of them were critic (supervising) teachers in local public schools, in a large, midwestern city. (Eighteen cases were eliminated because of incomplete data and/or card punching errors.) All grade levels (K-12) were represented by the teachers, and subjects taught included the usual range; i.e., 29% of teachers and students were working at levels K-3, 25% were in 9-12 settings, 3% were in home economics, 17% were in health-physical education, etc. The mean of teaching experience in years for teachers was 6.9 years.

The 84 students were required to do 12 hours of field experience, related to Educational Foundations tasks as part of a course called Problems in Education. Each was provided with a self-instructional manual explaining how to perform each of nine tasks, and each was required to evaluate and report on each task. Anonymity in responses was maintained.

Tasks students were required to complete included the following: (1) active observation; (2) preparing a lesson; (3) presenting a lesson; (4) evaluating the lesson; (5) self-evaluation of testing technique; (6) preparing a test; (7) evaluating the test; (8) self-evaluation of testing technique; and (9) assistance in extracurricular activity.

Data were collected by means of a Likert Scale, which required subjects to respond in one of five categories about the value of each of the nine assigned tasks. They indicated whether each activity had (1) no value; (2) little value; (3) moderate value; (4) much value; or (5) very much value. Point bi-serial correlation was used to analyze these data, and the analysis yielded descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients). Power analysis was run with an alpha of .05 and effect size (f^2) equal to .15 was found (suggested by Cohen, 1977, and Newman and Benz, 1979, as medium effect); this produced a power estimate of .99. The alpha level was set at .05 and the t-test was used to test for significance.

Results

The curriculum innovations were perceived by all participants as valuable--by experienced practicing teachers and by teacher trainees. Although each of the nine tasks was perceived as valuable by experienced practicing teachers and by teacher trainees, all nine tasks were not valued the same by teachers and by students. The following table shows that all participants, teachers, and students valued each of the nine tasks, but that students' valuing of the tasks were in each case lower than those of experienced teachers.

Table 1

Mean Ratings of the Values of Nine Tasks
by Teachers and by Students
(1 - no value; 5 - very much value)

Tasks	Mean Teacher Ratings	Mean Student Ratings
1. active observation	4.34	3.96
2. preparing a lesson	4.65	4.11
3. presenting a lesson	4.76	4.21
4. evaluating the lesson	4.65	3.75
5. self-evaluating the lesson	4.52	3.73
6. preparing a test	4.50	3.45
7. evaluating the tests	4.47	3.38
8. self-evaluation of testing technique	4.43	3.37
9. assistance in extracurricular activity	3.97	3.31

In general, it can be said that students rated tasks one-half to one full category lower than did teachers. In other words, teachers thought all nine tasks had much to very much value; students thought all tasks had moderate to much value. Interestingly, none of the tasks was indicated by means of students' responses or of teachers' responses to be of little or no value. A third finding is that there were significant differences in each of the nine categories between students' and teachers' responses to the value of each activity. The correlation coefficients between variables "teacher status" and "value of a task" were in each case significant at the .05 or better level.

Table 2

Tasks	Correlation Coefficients*
1. active observation	.173
2. preparing a lesson	.279
3. presenting a lesson	.286
4. evaluating the lesson	.397
5. self-evaluating of teaching	.312
6. preparing a test	.320
7. evaluating the test	.338
8. self-evaluation of testing technique	.321
9. assistance in extracurricular activity	.184

*Each r is significant at the .05 level or better.

The above table indicates that experienced teachers rated the value of each of the nine tasks significantly higher than teacher trainees rated them.

Conclusions

Although teacher trainees in this project were required to perform certain tasks, no resentment, anger, or hostility was indicated by students' or teachers' responses. It had been feared that students, taking a required core course, and further required to take on the added burden of completing a structured field experience so late in their educational careers would resent the requirement as "busy work," too burdensome, or useless. None of this occurred, and the researchers feel that this was because directions were clear and the tasks were seen as relevant and helpful. It was gratifying for the designers of this program being evaluated to learn that experienced teachers (mean teaching experience--6.9 years) highly valued each of the tasks the students were asked to complete. It was further learned that the perceptions of

teacher educators and experienced classroom teachers in terms of this field experience were not so far apart. The designers of the program learned that mean responses of students indicated that, in every case, tasks were viewed as having moderate (3.5) to much value (4.5). This finding indicates that, although students thought these activities useful, they were not as enthusiastic about them as were experienced classroom teachers. Thus, we did reach the objective of this study, to assess a new curriculum component and to learn if perceptions of teacher educators, of experienced classroom teachers, and of teacher trainees differed. Perceptions did differ: teacher educators' perceptions (although not measured) were quite consistent (as conceptualized) with perceptions of practicing classroom teachers, but significantly different from the perceptions of the teacher trainees.

This research did not attempt to evaluate this difference. However, one might speculate on the reasons. The students were younger than the teachers, and this might account for some of the differences in ratings. Also, it is well known that students at this stage of their professional training are eager to assume adult roles and professional responsibilities; after 16 years of formal education, they are eager to shed the role of "student." (This line of thinking is borne out by the fact that students rated highest--(4.21)--the task, "presenting a lesson.") Thus, anything associated with passivity of student status would tend to be lowly rated. The teacher educators differences probably resulted from different course emphasis. One of the instructors had always used a field component in her sections of the course and the others were using this activity for the first time. It would be important to repeat this study with provision for looking at this difference.

Further, we have learned that it is possible for teacher educators to devise and implement a new structured field experience component of curriculum

that is perceived as valuable by experienced teachers and by teacher trainees. Whether these experiences would be valued more highly than many other possible activities is not known. Last, the difference in perceptions about the value of the program between students and teachers suggests that feedback from students is necessary so that the program might be improved. Suggestions of students would have to be considered, incorporated if feasible, and a new program would have to be designed, implemented and evaluated.

It is important to note that there was a group that was not satisfied with the project and it is as a result of this input that the greatest changes were made in the component. Other instructors in the College of Education felt that the tasks were too closely related to their areas of instruction or to teaching process. For the first time that anyone could remember, the instructors involved met, shared their concerns, and modified the field component. The researchers then revised the program based on anecdotal evaluations given by the students in this study, the supervising teachers, and the College of Education instructors. The new field package that resulted from this cooperative report is summarized and included in Appendix A. This new program will be evaluated to consider, once again, differing perceptions of the value of the program of the three groups of educators. Last, it can be said that the curriculum innovation herein evaluated has been shown to be valued by students and by teachers and, thus, constitutes some kind of model others in similar circumstances might wish to consider.

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Appendix A

A PACKET FOR FIELD EXPERIENCE
(Selected Materials)

Problems in Education
(5100:450)

The University of Akron
Spring, 1982

FIELD EXPERIENCE
Department of Educational Foundations

PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION (5100:450)

This course requires 12 hours of field experience in order to:

1. Fulfill the requirements of the Ohio State Board of Education.
2. Provide practical learning experiences.
3. Increase proficiency in performing various teaching activities.
4. Broaden student background through:

Observing	Attending
Participating	Applying
Interviewing	Creating
Volunteering	Understanding
Tutoring	Sharing

This packet has been designed to meet each student's needs. There are three possible avenues your field experience can take.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES YOU MAY ENGAGE IN
FOR YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCE

1. Aiding your cooperating teacher in additional activities.
2. Observing teachers, administrators, students, classrooms, extracurricular events, etc.
3. Teaching, tutoring, or counseling individuals, small or large groups.
4. Conducting interviews with teachers, administrators, etc.
5. Assisting in extra-curricular events.

6. Studying a problem (discipline, school climate, drugs, special education, mainstreaming, values, etc.).

7. Visiting museums, health facilities, churches, government and city offices, community agencies, and other sites/activities in the community related to your area of professional interest.

ESSAY

A three page essay containing your observations and conclusions is to be written, applying the usual scholastic and academic criteria:

> following instructions, punctuality, neatness, spelling, punctuation, grammar, legibility, principles of English usage and of theme construction, completeness, and the worth, clarity and cogency of your written material.

VISITATION PROJECT

If you are not student teaching this semester, you may fulfill the requirements of this course for twelve hours of field experience by designing and implementing a visitation project.

A visitation project involves a series of visits to various sites in the community. You may choose from:

1. Agencies
2. Churches
3. Health facilities
4. Government and city offices
5. Museums
6. Interviewing knowledgeable individuals
7. Attending meetings and lectures
8. Other activities in the community related to your area of interest.

VOLUNTEER PROJECT

If you are not student teaching this semester, you may fulfill the requirements of this course for twelve hours of field experience by volunteering twelve hours in a program related to your field.

A volunteer project must be arranged by you. There is a file in Zook 301P which lists sites for possible volunteer activities.

It is your responsibility to explain the nature of this field experience to any supervisory persons you may deal with. If you do not plan to volunteer beyond twelve hours, you must make this clear to supervisory persons.

Some possible sites for a volunteer project are:

1. Museums and libraries
2. Health facilities
3. Community agencies
4. Churches
5. Schools

EVALUATION FORM FOR THE STUDENT

TO THE PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION STUDENTS:

We would greatly appreciate any advice, comments, or criticisms you have to offer so that we may be able to evaluate and improve this field experience. Please answer the following questions. It is not necessary to sign your name to this form.

Regarding the field experience assignment:

Please tell how this experience has broadened your knowledge (e.g., provided practical experience, helped to increase your proficiency, etc.).

How might this experience be improved?

I would retain

I would omit

EVALUATION FORM FOR THE SUPERVISING PERSON

The Foundations of Education Department at The University of Akron desires to have a close working relationship with all those involved in Field Experience. We would greatly appreciate any advice, comments, or criticisms you have to offer so that we may be able to evaluate and improve our program.

By completing this form, you will be assisting us in assessing and revising the Field Experience program.

Regarding the field experience assignment:

Please tell us how this experience has benefitted the student (e.g., has it taught a new skill, provided practical experience outside the classroom, etc.?).

How might this experience be improved?

I would retain

I would omit